

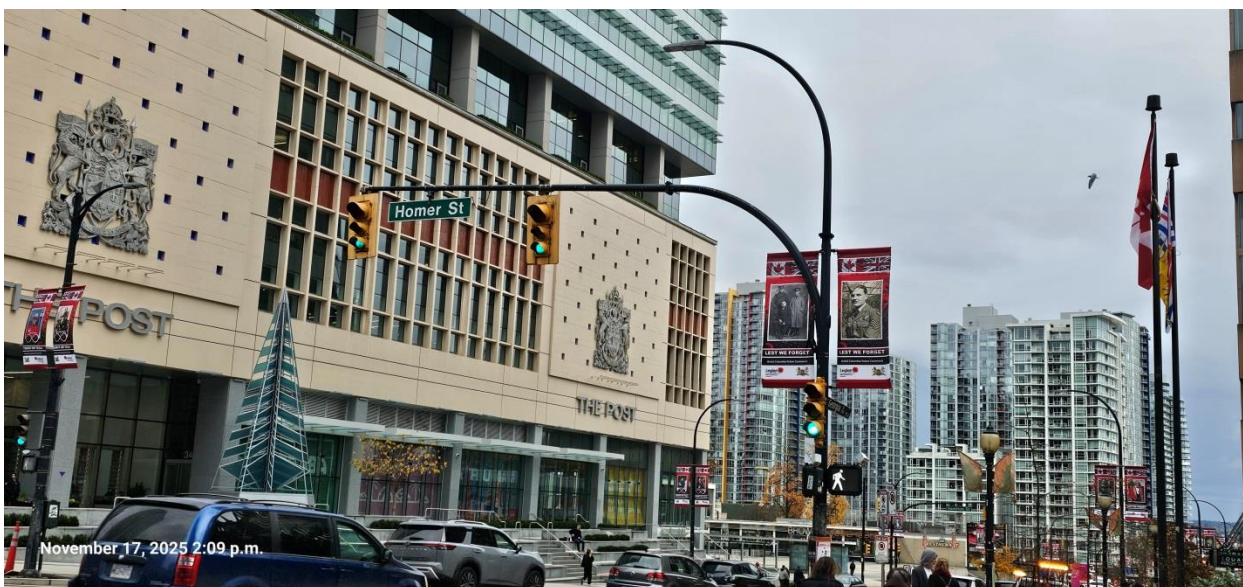
Remembrance Day 2025

After the commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of VJ-Day in Ottawa on August 15 during the well-attended, well-organized August 14-17 reunion of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, I committed to a more vigorous participation in Remembrance Day observances this year than in previous years.

These observances began on November 8, the National Aboriginal Remembrance Day, with a Service at Victory Square to honour First Nations, Inuit, and Métis veterans. On November 11, Remembrance Day Service was held at Victory Square Cenotaph beginning at 10:00 am, followed by a Service at the Chinatown Memorial Monument at 12:30 pm.

Already from the earliest days of November again this year, Remembrance of Canada's war veterans was prominent in the city landscape -- from "Lest We Forget" on transit bus destination screens, and poppies on people's lapels, to the BC Legion banners in the area surrounding Victory Square in downtown Vancouver.

About 500 banners were installed last year, initiated on the 100th anniversary of the City's Cenotaph. The goal this year was 1000 banners. The two photos below I took recently, north of the Central Library on West Georgia, with the former Main Post Office to the left, a location two blocks south and west of Victory Square.



Saturday, November 8 was National Aboriginal Remembrance Day to honour the military service of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis veterans. The Vancouver event was hosted by the Squamish Nation, the largest of three First Nations in the Vancouver area.

The event was preceded by a march on Hastings Street to the Victory Square Cenotaph (10:15am) and proceedings began around 10:30, with a Moment of Silence at 11:11am. There were several presenters and about 50 wreath-layers. There was much drumming at various moments during the event, and Last Post was performed by a bagpiper.

On my mind were the several Métis I met at the HKVCA reunion in August. I recalled too the Métis Veterans Legacy Program undertaken to identify the Hong Kong Veterans with Indigenous ancestry and to honour their histories and promote awareness of Indigenous participation in 'C' Force. 128 veterans were found to have documented Indigenous ancestry, many of them Red River Métis who enlisted in the Winnipeg Grenadiers.

At the finish the Director of Ceremonies called on all the veterans, mothers of veterans, and wreath-layers to step into the circle around the Cenotaph for a group photo.



The Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph in Victory Square on Tuesday, November 11 was a well-attended event, on a blessedly beautiful sunny day.

The event had a new Director of Ceremonies this year, Doug Poitras, who had accompanied Jim Stanton at last year's event. Mr. Poitras, who also participated in the Saturday event, wore the Métis sash which is "a symbol of unity and pride, representing the resilience and history of the Métis people." Also present and co-ordinating events on the site, as he does every year for many years now, was Robert Underhill, a retired member of the RCMP and member of the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Chair of the City's Remembrance Day Observance Committee.

This Cenotaph is one of the very few in Canada (perhaps the only one?) installed and managed by the local government rather than the Royal Canadian Legion. It is also one of the very few to have a Change of the Vigil Guard at Remembrance Day observance (Mounting, Change, and Dismount of the Guard), consisting of two groups of four non-commissioned members from Canada's Armed Forces (Army, Navy, and Air) and RCMP.

In addition to "O Canada" at the beginning and "God Save the King" at the end, "The Maple Leaf Forever" was sung, and Lt. Col. John MacCrae's "In Flanders Fields" was read. Two trumpeters performed The Last Post and a bagpiper performed The Lament. The Prayer of Remembrance was delivered this day by Captain Reverend Kenneth Lo, a Canadian Forces Chaplain of many years and the first ever Chinese-Canadian in that role. He spoke very well.

Another poem read was the winner of the annual Cam Cathcart Remembrance Day Poem Contest created by Cam, a former director of ceremonies for many, many years, to engage young people with the Remembrance Day ceremony and ensure their voices are heard. The winner of the Cameron Cathcart Youth Poem of Remembrance Award this year was Angela Chen, a Grade 12 student from Lord Byng Secondary School, for the poem "Alone Without a Goodbye."

As in previous years there were 15 Official Wreaths (I placed one of these in 2011) and many Recognized Wreaths. While the Official Wreaths are announced each in turn, the Vancouver Bach Family of Choirs sings throughout the placing of Recognized Wreaths. The classic hymn "Abide with Me" was one of these (or perhaps it was a bagpipe number?).

I took very few photos of the event this year, this below being one of two taken of our wreath -- in anticipation that I would return in early afternoon after the event in Chinatown for a more relaxed look-see.

The event was captured by Global TV. See (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swrk7Lod-Jk>). They always manage to include me placing a wreath on behalf of HKVCA! I have another 15 secs of fame at the 1:29:00 mark of the 1:40:55 event. 69 recognized wreaths are listed in the program. With Wreath #5, my turn came early in the process. (<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/vancouver-remembrance-day-program.pdf>).



Chinatown Remembrance Day Ceremony held at the Chinatown Memorial Monument began at 12:30 pm.

The community-organized event, coordinated by the Vancouver Chinatown Remembrance Day Committee, is supported by many Chinatown organizations. Vice-chair of this committee, Steve Ko from ANAVETS, is in the photo on the right, while, either King Wan (committee chair) or Alfred Woo, was to the right at a lectern outside the picture frame.

The Chinatown Memorial Monument, unveiled in November 2003, is “a remembrance to the struggles of the ancestors of many who still live in the area, recognized in the two statues on this monument. The railway worker on the right recognizes the thousands of Chinese Canadians who lived and died building the Trans-Canadian railway system, while the figure on the left is a World War II era soldier representing the six hundred odd Chinese Canadians who volunteered in the War efforts, proving their patriotism which also later earned them the right to vote. The main column is a stylized form of the Chinese character “centre” and symbolizes Chinese culture.”

The Padre offering Prayer spoke quite proudly of the many Chinese-Canadian veterans of both the Great War (200) and the Second World War (600). The service of these veterans has been described as “One War, Two Victories”—a triumph not only against tyranny but also for civil rights, including the eventual achievement of voting rights and full citizenship for Chinese-Canadians.

The last three Chinese-Canadian veterans died this year: Gordie Quan, Victor Wong, and Charlie Lee. They will be remembered.



A return to the Cenotaph in early afternoon after events were completed in Chinatown was on my schedule. After 2pm there are very few if any people there and so it is possible to have a close look at the accumulation of wreaths and poppies and to take some pictures. I make a point of reading each and every wreath and also the several home-made ones added after the event. These are always very moving.

Our wreath had acquired the biggest collection of poppies deposited by the public! [Compare the three wreaths in the photo below. Also compare the HKVCA wreath in photo below to the one above taken before placing the wreath at the base of the Cenotaph.] I have seen poppies like this on the wreath in recent years, but this year was the most ever.

It is a recent practice at the Cenotaph (since COVID?) for the public to be invited to leave their poppy at the base of the cenotaph or on a wreath at the end of a ceremony. This practice is known to be observed at the National Remembrance Day ceremony in Ottawa where poppies are placed on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

In my "Thoughts About Remembrance Day at Victory Square 2025" (forthcoming), I speculate about the many poppies on the HKVCA wreath.



On the Vancouver waterfront just two blocks north and west of Victory Square, is Waterfront Centre -- the former CPR station now an inter-modal (transit, subway, commuter train, and seabus) transportation centre.

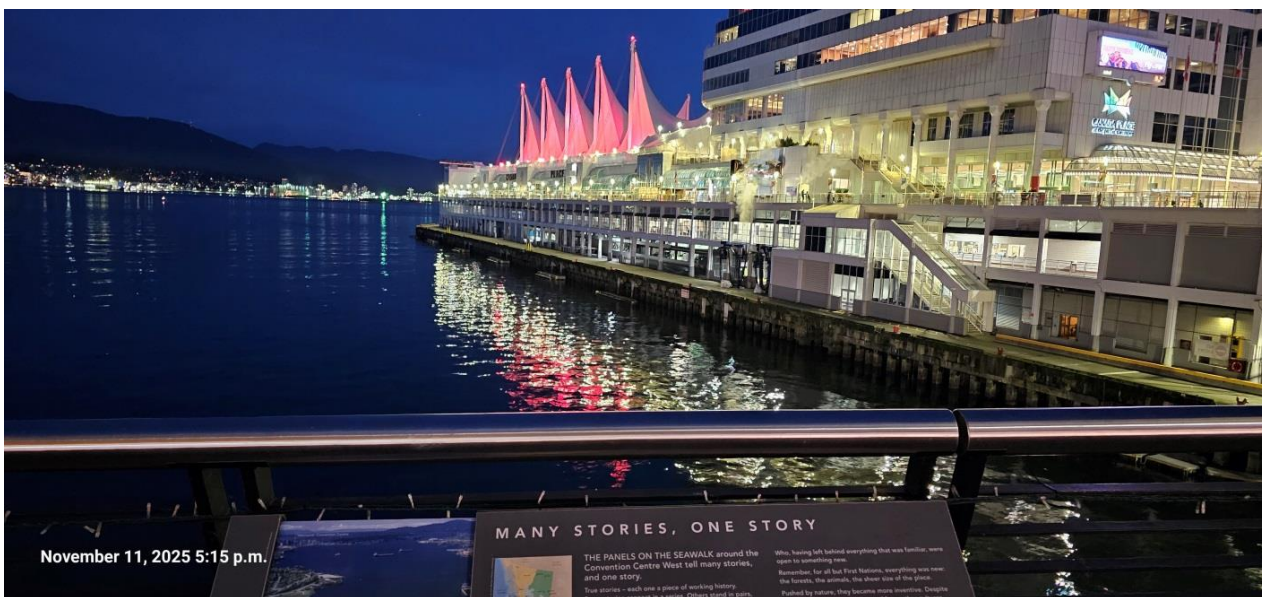
At the south-east corner of the former railway station is a statue (Angel of Victory, 1921) installed by the Canadian Pacific Railway company to honour its many employees who served in the Great War. The CPR commissioned two other identical statues, in Winnipeg (1922) and Montreal (1923).

Depicting an angel raising a deceased soldier to heaven, it was considered one of the most evocative memorial sculptures in Canada of the First World War. Since 1936, the majestic, soaring Canadian War Memorial at Vimy in France stands as the greatest tribute to Canada's many, many who served and died in the Great War (66,000 deaths 1914-1918).

Not far from Waterfront Centre and nearer still to the water is Canada Place. Built as the Canada Pavilion for Vancouver's Expo 86, it was constructed upon the pilings and deck of the former CPR Steamships Pier B&C.

It was here on Monday, October 27, 1941 that HMT Awatea was boarded by the soldiers of the Royal Rifles of Canada and Winnipeg Grenadiers, and also soldiers from a number of British Columbia regiments (providing signals corps, communications, medical, and other support personnel). From here C Force left in the evening for a destination known to only very few.

Throughout November the five sails at Canada Place are illuminated in poppy red (not so obvious in this photo!)



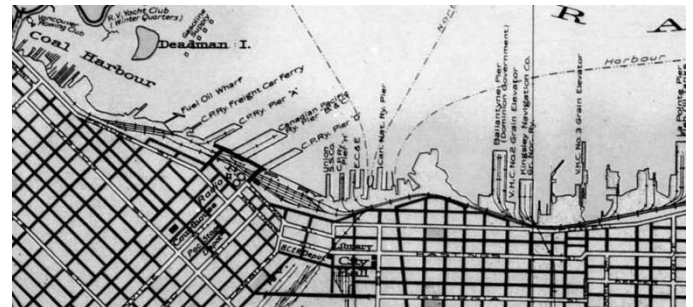


It seemed fitting this year that I could add a footnote to my research in 2022-23 regarding the departure of C Force from the Vancouver waterfront (detailed in a photo essay written up this summer entitled “X Marks the Spot”).

Two CNR trains carried the Royal Rifles to Vancouver from Valcartier, Quebec and two CPR trains brought the Grenadiers from Winnipeg. Both arrived on Monday, October 27th and discharged their many passengers at the former CPR Steamship Terminal on Pier B&C near the foot of Hornby Street, between Burrard and Granville Streets (shown in photo to the left taken from top of the Marine Building in 1927).

1,975 soldiers boarded the HMT Awatea moored on the west side of the CPR Pier. However, due to crowded conditions on the vessel, the HMCS Prince Robert, a former CNR ship believed to be moored at CNR pier at the foot of Main Street and retaining most of its previous crew, refitted as a destroyer and preparing to escort the Awatea to Hong Kong, was tasked to carry four army officers and 106 ranks of the Royal Rifles of Canada. They were accompanied by Gander, the large dog which had become their Regimental Mascot during their assignment in Newfoundland.

No prominent building stands today on the site of the former CNR Pier (depicted on the map below).



Information was found that describes the former CNR Steamships terminal building as “a distinctive Spanish Colonial-style terminal at the foot of Main Street from 1931 to 1983.” But no picture of the building was found -- until late last month! Walking through the lobby of an older office building, I spotted this framed photo shown on the left. With a North Shore mountain backdrop, it shows the former CNR Steamships terminal, with its south-facing main entrance on the rail overpass at the north foot of Main Street, and rail access at the lower ground level below.

